

THE SONS OF SENEK'ERIM YOVHANNĒS,
THE LAST KING OF VASPURAKAN, AS BYZANTINE ARISTOCRATS

by

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The last king of Vaspurakan, a region located to the south and southeast of Lake Van, was the well-known Senek'erim Yovhannēs. Because he had joined secretly the anti-Byzantine alliance of the Georgian king Giorgi, he had to pay a heavy price. Vaspurakan became a Byzantine ducate in 1022, and the royal family had to migrate to Kappadokia, probably in the winter 1022/23. For the details it is enough to refer to my article in *Handes Amso-rya* many years ago.¹

Senek'erim's sons used this name (of semitic origin) as a kind of family name. In Greek it normally appears as Senacherim/Senachereim.

Senek'erim Yovhannēs Arcruni, the king of Vaspurakan (1003-1022), was the son of Abusahl Hamazasp. After his forced emigration he lived some years in Kappadokia, where he died around 1025. We don't know any seal of him.

He was married to Xušuš, the daughter of the Armenian king Gagik I. Some years ago I published her seal (of mediocre preservation) which she used after her husband had passed away.² It was in the Zacos collection and is now in Paris.³



Fig. 1.

Seal of Chususa Zoste, the mother of David Senacherem Magistros.

¹ SEIBT 1978a.

² SEIBT 1997, 269-272; 408-409.

³ BnF 567; for the photo we thank Jean-Claude Cheynet.

On the obverse there is a bust of the Theotokos, the hands in a kind of modest Deesis in front of the breast (“Minimalorantentypus” according to Herbert Hunger). The sigla MHP / ΘV and remains of the invocative inscription are visible: [Θ(εοτό)κε βοήθε]ι τῇ σῇ [δούλῃ].

The reverse legend reads:

± XδCδ-[C]A ZOCTH - . MHP ΔΑΔ ΜΑ-ΓICTPδ T – [C]ENAXE-PHM
Χουσοῦ[σ]α ζ(ω)στῇ [ῇ] μῇ(τη)ρ Δα(βι)δ τ(οῦ) [Σ]εναχερήμ.

It would also be possible to read the legend in the dative, according to the invocation of the obverse, but then MPI would be better than MHP.

Xušuš is not an Armenian name, but has perhaps an Iranian origin (xuš means “good” in new Persian⁴). From an inscription in the church of Hagia Sophia in Varag (to the east of the town Van) we know that she was a daughter of Gagik I Šahnšah, who was AD 989/990-1020 king of Greater Armenia.

From this seal we learn that Xušuš was honored by the Byzantine emperor, probably Basil II, with the title of Patrikia Zoste.⁵ She defines her position not in respect to her husband, who had already passed away, but in respect to her eldest son, Dawit’ Senek’erim. This Dawit’ is well known from the sources. When a Turkmenian army under Dailamitic leaders invaded Vaspurakan, Dawit’ and the general Šapuh confronted them but were badly beaten near Ostan, probably on January 5, 1017. As a consequence the Artsrunians hoped to conclude a military alliance with Byzantium, as the emperor Basil II, who was already quite near to the final victory against the Kometopouloi in Bulgaria, had built up a very strong and efficient army (including many Armenians, a družina from Rus’, Georgians from the now Byzantine Iberia etc.). But Dawit’s embassy to the emperor (1018) turned surprisingly into another result, as the Armenian presumptive successor to the throne of Vaspurakan was persuaded to enter the Byzantine army and became πατρίκιος καὶ στρατηγὸς Καππαδοκίας. At the same time (early in 1019) he ceded the regions which already belonged to him to the emperor, but was compensated with regions around Sebasteia in the thema of Kappadokia. We can understand that the royals in Vaspurakan were not amused about such a development. On one hand Senek’erim Yovhannēs joined the anti-Byzantine coalition of Giorgi, the king of Georgia/Sakartvelo, together with the kings of Greater Armenia,

⁴ JUSTI 1895, 501.

⁵ For the office and title „Patrikia zoste“ cf. CHEYNET 2008, 163-173; on p. 172f. the seal of Xušuš is mentioned (with photo).

and on the other hand Dawit' collaborated for some time with the Byzantine rebels around Nikephoros Phokas and Nikephoros Xiphias when Basil II was at war with Giorgi (1021). But when the emperor turned out as victor Dawit' participated in the killing of Phokas.

Nevertheless the Artsrunians had to pay heavily: The kingdom of Vaspurakan became a Byzantine ducate in 1022, and in the winter 1022/1023 king Senek'erim Yovhannēs, his family and many aristocrats of his retinue were forced to migrate to Kappadokia. For the sake of appearances the old king was honored with the title of Magistros (in this time a high ranking one), he obtained certain territories and as apanage not some provinces but only the income (or at least some taxes) of these provinces.⁶ When he passed away shortly later on, around 1025, his eldest son Dawit' became his heir.⁷ From the seal we learn that he also was honored with the title of Magistros. But we do not know if he got still another military command before he passed away AD 1034 (or 1035 at the latest). Dawit' had one daughter, who married later on — according the wishes of emperor Konstantinos Monomachos - Gagik II, the former king of Greater Armenia, around 1045, to guarantee him a solid economic base. In my article I pointed to the possibility that Xušuš became curator of the domain of her deceased son as long as his daughter was a minor; so perhaps she used the above seal still after 1035.⁸

We do not possess a seal which could be attributed to Dawit' personally with any probability; the Δαβήθ βέστης of a former Zacos seal⁹ seems to be another person.

The second son of king Senek'erim Yovhannēs Arcruni was Atom. This name does not have an Armenian but perhaps an Iranian origin;¹⁰ we know some persons from the Gnuni, Anjewac'i and also Arcruni family called Atom. Jean-Claude Cheynet was right in attributing to Senek'erim's son a seal of the Perk collection mentioning an Atouemes Senachereim Proedros;¹¹ soon afterwards a parallel was offered in auctions.¹²

⁶ Erroneously some scholars thought about a quasi-autonomous status of the Artsrunians in these themata, but that is absolutely impossible, as the Byzantine administration did not change there.

⁷ Cf. SEIBT 1978a, 50-66.

⁸ SEIBT 1997, 270.

⁹ ZACOS – NESBITT 1984, 444. Cf. SEIBT 1997, 271.

¹⁰ Cf. JUSTI 1895, 50.

¹¹ CHEYNET 2006, 220f. The title of Proedros is one step higher than Magistros; till the middle of the 11th century only a very restricted number of dignitaries could achieve this title.

¹² Auction Gorny & Mosch 181, 12.-13.10.2009, no. 2806 (with some faults); repeated in Auctions Münz Zentrum 154, 13.-14.1. 2010, no. 688, and 156, 1.-2.9. 2010, no. 914.



Fig. 2.
Seal of Atouemes Senachereim Proedros

On the obverse appears a bust of St. George, as usual with lance and shield. The reverse legend reads:

+ ΚΕ Ρ,Θ, - ΑΤΟΒΕΜΗ – ΠΡΟΕΔΡΩ – ΤΩ CENA-XEPEIM.

Κ(ύρι)ε β(οή)θ(ει) Ἀτουέμη προέδρω τῷ Σεναχερείμ.

Under the legend an ornament like the letter X with pearls in the free space, between horizontal bars.

This seal proves that the Armenian name Atom could be transcribed as Atouemes in Byzantium. Atom and his brother Abusahl remained devoted to the Armenian church and resisted Byzantine temptations to accept the creed of Chalkedon, so they came into troubles with some emperors. We may assume that Atom became Magistros soon after the death of Dawit', and according to the seals he was honored later on with the title of Proedros, perhaps under Konstantinos X Dukas (1059-1067). According to Matth'ēos Uṙhayec'i the two brothers Atom and Apusahl were still alive when king Gagik II of Ani, the former king of Greater Armenia, was killed.¹³ It is possible that the Byzantine family Atouemes was Atom's offspring.¹⁴

Atom's younger brother was Apusahl / Abusahl. He inherited this name (of Arabic origin, *scil.* Abu-Sahīl) from his grandfather, Abusahl Hamazasp, king of Vaspurakan, the father of Senek'irim Yovhannēs. Matth'ēos

¹³ Matth'ēos Uṙhayec'i 220; trad. Dostourian 145 (for the year 1079/1080). On Byzantine seals Gagik is called Κακίκιος Ἀνιώτης, cf. SEIBT 1993; CHEYNET – THEODORIDIS 2010, no. 6-7.

¹⁴ For a Michael Atouemes sebastos see SEIBT – ZARNITZ 1997, 3.2.8; CHEYNET – THEODORIDIS 2010, no. 24; for a Nikephoros Atouemes sebastos see CHEYNET – THEODORIDIS 2010, no. 25 (but the Michael sebastos and koiaistor, l.c. no 23, was not an Ateumes but an Atzymes). Another Nikephoros Atouemes sebastos is published in SEIBT 1978b, no. 174.

Ufhayec'i mentions him together with his brother Atom. Of Abusahl we know two seal types from the former Zacos collection, one as Proedros, and one with the still higher title Kuropalates. The first one is now in Paris¹⁵ and was published by Jean-Claude Cheynet.¹⁶



Fig. 3.
Seal of Aposachles Senachereim Proedros.

The bust on the obverse is a problem. As the sigla read Θ – ΔΗ- and afterwards perhaps Μ, it should be St. Demetrios, though the face looks elongated, perhaps even with a beard. The lower part is heavily damaged, but as there are not any weapons the saint was holding probably a cross in front of the chest. The reverse reads:

[+] ΚΕ ΡΟ-[ΗΘΕ]Ι ΑΠΟ-[ΣΑΧΛ]Η ΠΡΟ-[ΕΔΡ]Ω ΤΩ ΣΕ-ΝΑΧΗΡΕΙ-Μ.
Κ(ύρι)ε βο[ήθε]ι Ἀπο[σάχλ]η προ[έδρ]ω τῷ Σεναχηρείμ.

At the end of the first name the letter before the H is damaged; Cheynet wanted to read X, but I am convinced that it is a pressed Lambda. So it is not necessary to think about Aposaches or even Apokapes.



Fig. 4.
Seal of Aposachles Senachereim Kuropalates.

¹⁵ BnF 568.

¹⁶ CHEYNET 2006, 222.

The other seal is in very good condition.¹⁷ The obverse shows two standing military saints, St. Demetrios and St. Theodoros, in a kind of *Deesis* to a medallion of Christ in the center. And the reverse reads:

+ ΚΕ Ρ,Θ, - ΤΩ CΩ ΔΗΛ, - ΑΠΟΣΑΧΛΗ – ΚΟΥΡΟΠΑΛΑ-ΤΗ ΤΩ CΕΝΑ-ΧΕΡΕΙΜ.

Κ(ύρι)ε β(οή)θ(ει) τῷ σῶ δούλ(ῳ) Ἀποσάχλη κουροπαλάτη τῷ Σεναχερείμ.

This type would be very good for the 60ies or 70ies of the 11th century, but I would imagine that Abusahl achieved the high rank of Kuropalates only in the 70ies, from Michael VII Dukas (1071-1078) or from Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078-1081).

Just recently there appeared a new seal of this Abusahl with the still higher title of Nobellisimos.¹⁸ The obverse is very similar to the former type as Kuropalates, but the two standing figures had changed their position: St. Theodoros stands here at left and St. Demetrios at right.

The reverse reads:

+ ΚΕ Ρ,Θ, - ΑΠΟΣΑΧΛΗ – ΝΩΡΕΛΛΙCΙ-ΜΩ ΤΩ CΕΝΑ-ΧΗΡΕΙΜ

Κ(ύρι)ε β(οή)θ(ει)) Ἀποσάχλη νωβελισίμῳ τῷ Σεναχηρείμ.



Fig. 4.A.

Seal of Aposachles Senachereim Nobellisimos

Abusahl achieved this high rank of Nobellisimos probably from Alexios I in or after 1081, though a date some years earlier, during the reign of Botaneiates, is not impossible.

The youngest brother of this couple was Konstantinos. From him we have again seals as Proedros and Kuropalates. The first type is represented

¹⁷ Auction Spink 132, 25.5.1999 (Zacos II), no. 121; cf. CHEYNET 2006, 222, n. 40.

¹⁸ Auction Roma Numismatics 9, 22. 3. 2015, lot 978. Cf. www.RomaNumismatics.com.

by an excellent seal in Dumbarton Oaks,¹⁹ edited (without photo) by Jean-Claude Cheynet,²⁰ and probably an exact parallel was found in Bulgaria.²¹



Fig. 5.
Seal of Konstantinos Senachereim Proedros.

The obverse has a bust of the Theotokos Episkepsis,²² with the sigla MP / ΘV, and the reverse reads:

ΘΚΕ Ρ,Θ, - ΤΩ CΩ ΔΘ-ΛΩ ΚΩΝ ΓΡΟ-ΕΔΡΩ ΤΩ – CENAXH-PEIM.
Θ(εοτό)κε β(οή)θ(ει) τῷ σῷ δούλῳ Κων(σταντίνῳ) προέδρῳ τῷ Σενα-
χηρείμ.

Under the legend probably a pearl between two horizontal bars.

This type stems from the 60ies or 70ies of the 11th century. Ivan Jordanov wanted to attribute to this man another seal of a Konstantinos Proedros, but he could read only AX of the surname;²³ as there is a standing figure of a military saint on the obverse and many family names have AX in the middle, e.g. Blachernites, I do not include this bulla in our series.



Fig. 6.
Seal of Konstantinos Senachereim, Kuropalates and Dux

¹⁹ D.O. 55.1.3294; for the photo I thank Jonathan Shea.

²⁰ CHEYNET 2006, 223.

²¹ JORDANOV 2006, no. 648, and 2009, no. 498 (in both cases without a photo).

²² *Virgo orans* with a bust of the child in a medallion in front of her breast.

²³ JORDANOV 2006, no. 649, and 2009, no. 499 (without a photo).

The American Numismatic Society houses the bulla of Konstantinos Senachereim as Kuropalates and Dux.²⁴ On the obverse again a bust of the Theotokos Episkepsis, and the reverse has the legend:

+ ΘΚΕ R,Θ, - ΚΩΝ ΚΥΡΟ-ΠΑΛΑΤΗ S – ΔΟΥΚΙ ΤΩ – CENAXH-PEIM
Θ(εοτό)κε β(οή)θ(ει) Κων(σταντίνω) κουροπαλάτῃ (καὶ) δουκὶ τῷ
Σεναχηρείμ.

This type I would date to the 70ies or 80ies of the 11th century. It is the single type with a command, not only a title. In the Seventies, after Mantzikert, there was a time when the Byzantine administration tried to mobilize members of the high Armenian aristocracy for the defense of the endangered Eastern provinces, such as the former king Gagik, Philaretos Brachamios²⁵ and others.



Fig. 7.

Seal of Senacherim Kourtikes.

In the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul there is a seal of a Senacherim Kourtikes.²⁶ On the obverse a bust of the Theotokos Hodegetria,²⁷ and the reverse has the metrical legend: Κῦρος - σφραγί-ζω Σενα-χηρίμ - Κουρτί-κ(η). The seal stems from the last quarter of the 11th century. Probably the mother of this man was a daughter of a Senacherim, perhaps a sister of the afore-mentioned brothers. Senacherim is here a first name, Kourtikes the family name (according his father).

²⁴ ANS Seal 1944.100.84809 (Coll. E. T. Newell). I thank Elena Stolyarik for her help to find this seal. Ed.: CHEYNET 2006, 223 (without photo).

²⁵ For this general see SEIBT 2009.

²⁶ CHEYNET 2006, 224; CHEYNET – GÖKYILDIRIM – BULGURLU 2012, no. 7.70; WASSILIOU-SEIBT 2011, no. 1174. For the photo I thank J.-Cl. Cheynet.

²⁷ With the child on her left arm.



Fig. 8. Seal of Zoe Senachirina.

Père Laurent published already long ago the seal of a Zoe Senachirina in the Harvard Art Museums.²⁸ On the obverse there is a bust of the Theotokos orans; contrary to Laurent I would prefer to interpret it as an Episkepsis type. The reverse reads:

ZWH – MONAXH – H CENAXI-PINA.

Ζωή μοναχή ἡ Σεναχιρίνα.²⁹

The seal can stem already from the end of the 11th century, but I would prefer first half of the 12th century. Zoe was probably an offspring of the Artsruni family.

And there is a seal of a Ioannes, who was probably a Senacherim, though of this name there is only HM readable, the rest is lost. This bulla in a private Bulgarian collection was published by I. Jordanov.³⁰



Fig. 9. Seal of Ioannes Senacherem (?) Dikologos

²⁸ Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Bequest of Thomas Whittemore, 1951.31.5.2665. LAURENT 1965, no. 1477 (cited as Fogg 2665). For the photo I thank Jonathan Shea.

²⁹ Laurent preferred Σεναχερίνα. The letter after X is unclear.

³⁰ JORDANOV 2006, no. 647, and 2009, no. 2036. For the photo I thank I. Jordanov.

On the obverse one can see a bust of St. John Chrysostomos, the right hand in blessing, the left holding the gospels; of the sigla only ΙΩ at left is recognizable.

On the reverse we can read:-HM OIK.-.HN ΔΙΚΟΛΩ-.
ΟΜΩΝΥΜΟΥ-ΤΑ ΞΡΗΜΟΝ - .ΟΙΚ ΚΕΠΙ.

Under the legend X with pearls in the quarters, between a line on either side.

In the Corpus of metrical legends on Byzantine seals A.-K. Wassiliou-Seibt proposed the following reconstruction:

<Σεναχερ>ήμ οἰκ<έτ>ην δικολ<ογοῦν(τα)> δμωνυμου<ν>τα,
Χρ(υσο)ρήμ(ω)ν, <δ(ι)>δοις σκέπ[η(ν)].³¹

A date between 1060 and 1090 would be convenient. As Dikologos means a judge, John Senacherim was active in the civil administration of the Empire. It is possible, but not certain, that he was an offspring of the royal family of Vaspurakan.



Fig. 10. Seal of Theodoros Synacheris.

A seal in Athens mentions a Synacheris with the first name Theodoros.³² On the obverse a bust of St. Theodoros, and the reverse reads:

ΘΕΟΔΩ-ΡΟC CΦΡΑ-ΓΙC, Ο CV-NΑΧΕΠΙ-C.

Θεόδωρος σφραγίσ(ας) ὁ Συναχερίς.

End of the 11th or early 12th century. An act of the Protos Paulos on mount Athos (1089) mentions a certain Theodoros Senachereim as οἰκεῖος of the emperor Alexios I Komnenos, who brought an imperial Paradosis concerning the re-installation of Symeon as abbot of the Xenophontos

³¹ WASSILIOU-SEIBT 2015, no. 1920.

³² Athens, Numismatic Museum 690. STAVRAKOS 2000, 248; WASSILIOU-SEIBT 2011, no. 894 (we follow the interpretation of the latter one).

monastery to Mount Athos and controlled its execution as imperial agent.³³ Perhaps this man was related to the Artsrunians, but the Teodoros of the above seal probably not. Perhaps he was a person like the Senachereim mentioned in a letter of Theophylaktos of Ohrid,³⁴ who could have been a Praktor.³⁵

Some years ago Valentina S. Šandrovskaja published an Hermitage seal³⁶ of a Senacherim, who was apparently a contemporary of the king Senek'erim Yovhannēs and served under the Byzantine emperor as a Strategos.³⁷



Fig. 11.

Seal of Sebatas Senacherim, Protospatharios and Strategos of Serbion.

On the obverse is found a bust of St. Grigor Lusaworič', the Illuminator of Armenia, who had baptized the King of Greater Armenia, Trdat / Tiridates, around 315, making Armenia the first Christian kingdom. The inscription reads: Ὁ ἄγιος Γρηγόριος / τ(ῆς) Μ(ε)γ(άλ)ης Ἀρμ(ε)ν(ίας). Around the bust appear traces of the usual invocation Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθει τῷ σῷ δ[ι]ούλῳ.

Grigor Lusaworič' is rarely depicted on Byzantine seals, pointing *a priori* to a connection with Armenia in the context of the Armenian church.

The reverse legend reads:

+ CERAT, - ΑCΠAΘAP, S – CTPATIG ΘE-M, CEPPIΘ O – CENAXE-PIM.
 Σεβατ(ῷ) (πρωτο)σπαθαρι(ῶ) (καὶ) στρατ(η)γ(ῶ) θέμ(ατος) Σερβίου ὁ
 Σεναχερίμ.

³³ PAPACHRYSSANTHOU 1986, Acte 1, l. 66 and 75, p. 71.

³⁴ Theophylaktos, Letter 77, l. 22ff.

³⁵ MULLETT 1997, nr. 86-87.

³⁶ M-2213, from the former collection of the Russian Archaeological Institute in Constantinople. For the photo I thank Lena Stepanova.

³⁷ ŠANDROVSKAJA 2009, 209-218; EADEM 2010, 144-160.

There is apparently a change from Dative to Nominative, either at the end, or perhaps at the beginning of the reverse legend, as the editor has assumed.

In all probability Sebatas was the son of a Senacherim. Sebatas is a transliteration of the Armenian name Sewaday or Sewada, a name of Arab origin. The prosopographical lexicon of the Armenians by Hrač' Aĵarĵyan does not know our man, but mentions four persons called Sewada around the 11th century,³⁸ all of them for regions in the east of Armenia, but not a single one in Vaspurakan. Nr. 1 was išxan (a kind of small prince) in a region at this time called Albania; his daughter Šahanduxt († 1000/1006) married Smbat II, king of Siwnik' (ca. 970-998). Nr. 2, son of this couple (Smbat and Šahanduxt), founded a church in 1006. Nr. 3, son and successor of P'ilipe, was a small king (t'agavor) in Kapan (in the south of Siwnik'), around the middle of the 11th century. He had a son called Senek'arim. Nr. 4 was a son of Senek'erim I, king of Siwnik', † 1092.

In Aĵarĵyan's series³⁹ there are mentioned two different persons with the name Senek'erim, both of them called išxan of Albanians, who participated at the election of the Albanian Katholikos in 962,⁴⁰ and another one who is called even t'agavor (small king) on an inscription found in the region of Igdir (northwest of mount Ararat, in the province of Ayrarat) from the year 992, though this province was part of the Bagratid kingdom of Greater Armenia.⁴¹ Of special interest for the seal above seems to be a Senek'erim Yovhannēs,⁴² who is not identical with the king of Vaspurakan, but was king of P'arisos (to the east of Lake Sevan, and to the west of Gandza); he was the son of a Sewada išxan. This Senek'erim died 1003. His sister married Mušet, king of Kars. It could well be that the Sewada of the seal was a son of this Senek'erim, named after his grandfather. Sewada had joined the Byzantine army, probably under Basil II, and became Strategos of Serbia/Serbion, a town in Greek Makedonia (near the river Haliakmon, to the southeast of Kozane), not of the country of Serbia. I would date the seal to the first third of the 11th century. That is an excellent proof that not every Senachereim in Byzantium was an offspring of the last king of Vaspurakan.

³⁸ AĀRYAN 1948, 483f.

³⁹ AĀRYAN 1948, 477-481.

⁴⁰ AĀRYAN 1948, 478, no. 2 and 3.

⁴¹ AĀRYAN 1948, 478, no. 4.

⁴² AĀRYAN 1948, 478, no. 5. Cf. TOUMANOFF 1976, 237, no. 44 (6), who calls him prince of Xač'en and king of Albania, dating him before 980 till after 1000.

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